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ABSTRACT

This brochure is designed to help parents answer the questions that their children may ask them about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and the Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (HIV), the virus that causes AIDS. It provides basic information about AIDS and HIV, as well as sources for further information, such as the National AIDS Hotline. It recommends that parents: (1) answer questions when they are asked; (2) give appropriate, specific answers; (3) use specific and correct terminology; (4) initiate conversations about AIDS with children who may feel embarrassed about the topic; (5) continue to talk about AIDS as their children mature and develop; (6) refer questions that they cannot answer to health care professionals; and (7) observe their child's age and development level to guide their explanations. It provides specific advice for parents to use with children at various stages of their development, including preschool, kindergarten through grade 3, grades 4 through 6, grades 7 through 9, and grades 10 through 12. (MDM)

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mommy, daddy I Wha?'s AIDS?

ED 375 934

Today's children are the first generation to grow up with an awareness of the HIV virus and the AIDS epidemic.

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mommy, daddy — AIDS?

It's a scary thought for a parent. The HIV virus, which causes AIDS, is spreading faster than ever before and cases of AIDS are no longer restricted to "high risk" groups. In fact, experts predict that almost 20 percent of the United States' population could be infected with the HIV virus by the year 2000. Many of those infected people will be your children's classmates and neighbors — the people who they spend time with every day.

But today's children have an advantage. Since they are growing up in the age of AIDS, it is natural for them to learn about the virus and hear about how to prevent it. They have many questions about things they hear on television and stories told by other children or adults. And they look to parents for answers.

Get The Facts

Your children are surrounded by conflicting messages and myths about the HIV virus and people with AIDS. It's your job to help them sort through it all and uncover the truth that will help to keep them healthy and alive.

The first step to answering your children's questions about AIDS is to educate yourself. Read credible newspaper and magazine articles. Listen to the news. Send for informational brochures and pamphlets. Call the toll-free number for the National AIDS Hotline, 1-800-342-AIDS. Learn the facts.

And that job isn't always easy. As a parent, you probably have many questions of your own. For example, at what age should you start to talk to your children about HIV and AIDS? What should you tell them? How can you deliver your message effectively without scaring them?

Follow Some Basic And Logical Guidelines

There are no set rules when it comes to discussing important topics with your children. However, it is easier if you keep these basic ideas in mind.

- Answer questions when they are asked. Don't put them off. You may miss an important opportunity for an open discussion with your child.
- Listen to every question carefully and give an appropriate answer. Don't feel that you have to offer elaborate explanations — a simple and direct response will usually satisfy a child's curiosity.
- Always use specific and correct terms. This helps to avoid confusion.
- If you feel that your child might be too embarrassed to ask questions, look for opportunities to start a conversation such as after an appropriate television program or news report. Sometimes just mentioning the subject will let your child know that it's okay to talk.
- Don't stop after one conversation. HIV and AIDS are serious — they should be discussed many times as your child grows and develops.
- If your child has concerns or questions that you can't answer, talk to your local pediatric nurse practitioner or other health care professional. Get the information you need and respond to your child as soon as possible.
- Observe your child. Use your child's age and level of development as your guide to what and how much to say.

HIV And AIDS Messages Should Reach Children Of All Ages

Preschool

Preschool children do not require detailed information about HIV and AIDS, but it's important that adults answer questions as they arise and set standards for good health and safety practices. At this age, children are eager to learn and understand. They may be curious about family roles, the differences between men and women, and they even may have

questions about genital function and sexuality. Answering questions honestly and positively, using proper names for genitals and other body parts, can be considered the first step in AIDS education for young children.

Kindergarten, First, Second and Third Grades

During these years, children first become interested in and anxious about death. They also may associate death with being sick. It's important for them to know that AIDS is caused by a virus, but they can't catch that virus through everyday contact. Let them know that AIDS can be prevented and that neither of you is likely to get it. With older children in this group, you may need to explain that the HIV virus is passed during sex or when sharing needles to take illegal drugs with someone who has the virus. More detailed explanations probably are not required.

Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Grades

Children in this age group are becoming more aware of current events, and they will begin to pay more attention to the AIDS issue in the news. As a result, these children are receiving information constantly, but they often don't know how to interpret it. This is how dangerous myths are formed that cause prejudice and lead to the spread of the disease. Concepts such as self-esteem, family and friends, peer pressure, decision making and refusal skills for both drugs and sex, and the physical changes of puberty should be stressed. This strong foundation can balance sexual and drug related messages contained in popular music, videos and movies that are very influential in these pre-teen years.

Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Grades

Young teens need increasingly specific information about the transmission and prevention of HIV and AIDS. By this time, you should be sure your child knows that the HIV virus is transmitted mainly through IV-drug use and sex — that

passed through blood, semen, and vaginal secretions, and that you can get it from vaginal and anal intercourse and oral sex. They need to know that condoms can help to prevent AIDS. It also is very important to establish and stress the fact that your child can talk to you about AIDS. The incorporation of information will be gradual, but the goal is to have your child well informed by the time he or she reaches high school.

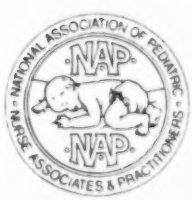
Tenth, Eleventh and Twelfth Grades

High school students probably receive AIDS education more easily than any other age group because they are mature enough to understand HIV, AIDS and related issues — drug use, sexuality and death. AIDS has become a topic in most high school health care classes. For this group, as well as for general adult audiences, there are several important points:

- The HIV virus causes AIDS — it is not a "gay" disease.
- People can have the HIV infection in their body for a long time without having the signs or symptoms of AIDS.
- Eventually, people with the HIV infection develop AIDS.
- AIDS and HIV are not casually transmitted — you will not catch HIV from normal contact with your friends and others.
- However, under the proper circumstances, anyone can contract HIV and can become infected with AIDS.
- You can protect yourself from acquiring HIV and getting AIDS by not using drugs, not sharing needles for any reason, not having sex or only having sex with one partner who is not infected.
- And, if you choose to be sexually active, practicing safer sex techniques (such as always using condoms) can prevent the spread of the disease. If you aren't infected with HIV, you can't get AIDS.

Remember, as a parent, you're not alone. There are many health care professionals, such as pediatric nurse practitioners, and several valuable information sources available. Don't be embarrassed to ask for help.

It's important for every parent to consider the topic of HIV and AIDS as if their child's life depended on it...
because it does.



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